

AS I SEE IT



Pat Costa

"Gunsmoke" has been canceled, I learn from the morning paper and the news has left me just a little sad.

At age 20, "Gunsmoke" is approximately the same age as a younger brother and sister of mine, born, needlessly to say, some years after me.

My first memories of that show coincide with some first memories of them. In its beginning years the series each Saturday night would begin with Matt Dillon, lean and stern, walking purposefully down the main drag in Dodge City, then turning quickly and shooting from the hip.

The two kids would be ready, poised in their pajamas, their toy pistols held at their sides and when old Matt let the bad guy have it, they did, too.

When the smoke had cleared on both sides of the screen, we would settle down for the only TV show I ever remember us watching together as a family.

Over the years, "Gunsmoke" has consistently offered some of the best written scripts, credible dialogue and at times even original plots. But in the department of character development it outshone everything in sight.

Will we ever forget Matt, Doc, Miss Kitty, Festus or even Chester who left years and years ago? I think not. Dodge City was peopled with a regular cast of good guys. None of them wore white hats but we had no trouble spotting their virtue. Each had a heart of gold coupled with an exterior of varying degrees of crustiness. Even Miss Kitty never dropped her left, though Matt could have melted her anytime had he chosen to smile in her

direction. Those of us who waited for years for him to show her outward affection were to wait in vain.

But only last year Matt proved he, too, was capable of emotion after Miss Kitty had departed. In a memorable hour playing against Miss Michael Learned (mother in "The Waltons") Matt fell in love only to lose the lovely widow lady through sickness or some other malady. Heroes of Westerns as we have learned almost never have anything other than star-crossed romances.

While most of "Gunsmoke's" story lines were woven around one or more tragedies, occasionally the writers would offer us a light hearted hour. This past season we got retelling of the Sabine women legend. In this adaptation, three hill brothers were sent to Dodge City by their father to get brides. When they couldn't persuade any of the town's lovelies to come with them they kidnaped a trio of saloon girls along with the house mother. MGM did it better with "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers" but for an hour of commercial TV it was the kind of fun that a surfeit of crime shows long ago pushed from the home screen.

In the last few years "Gunsmoke" has become an anthology series with the regulars sometimes on camera very briefly or not at all.

Always an impressionable playgoer, I remember at least one episode of "Gunsmoke" so that I could not literally go to sleep afterward.

If I remember correctly, Royal Dano played the father of a son who was to be hanged for murder. Trouble was the son was a coward and the father could not bear to see the son go to the gallows sniveling and whimpering. So he concocted a lie whereby he told the son that he had made a deal with Matt or the hangman to fake the hanging. The son would drop into a box below which would be released to the father. He would drive it out of town and the son could escape.

But it was only a lie to calm the son and the impact of the youth going unwittingly to his death was the kind of macabre psychological twist that undid me. It was classic "Gunsmoke": stark truth, grim tragedy, and unremitting justice. And that's what I'll remember about Matt and Co.



Commandery's Mission Gifts

The New York Grand Commandery and Grand Ladies Auxiliary, Knights of St. John, convened in Rochester May 2-4. From left to right are: Mrs. Frances Ryan, chairman of the mission exhibit which highlighted the convention; Brig. Gen. Donald E. Belouin of Schenectady, president of the state organization; Mrs. Helen Bittner, president of the state ladies auxiliary; and Father Joseph Reinhardt, diocesan director of the Propagation of the Faith. Mrs. Ryan and Mrs. Bittner are holding chalices from the exhibit. Father Reinhardt blessed the exhibit which was given to him.

Knights of St. John Record Resolutions

Resolutions on the Holy Year and Pope Paul VI, on lay involvement in parish life, on St. John and the use of the word John, on bills before the New York State Legislature and on pornography were passed by the New York Grand Commandery of the Knights of St. John in convention here last week.

The knights pledged themselves to "total cooperation" with Pope Paul "in his work of renewal and reconciliation during the Holy Year."

They further pledged to make themselves available for parish council work and for liturgical duties.

Noting the role of St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist in the Church, the knights agreed to refrain from the use of the word John to designate "the washroom, toilet and bathroom."

The knights also acknowledged their support for seven bills now in the state legislature.

At Home with Movies

PROMISE HIM ANYTHING  
Wednesday, May 14

Dumbo comedy about a young man (Frederic Forrest) who tries his luck with a sexy-sounding computer dating service. With his nefarious hopes up, he is disappointed with his appointed date (Meg Foster) when, naturally, nothing happens. heh, heh, heh. The clincher is that he decides to sue his date for breach of contract — she didn't read the fine print, or something. Forget it.

Unrated.

LARRY  
Thursday, May 15

A G.E. Theater presentation, starring Frederic Forrest as, a young man thought to be retarded simply because both his parents were, and because he grew up in a mental institution and therefore learned by imitating the behavior of the inmates. This sounds bizarre, and is, but it is based on a factual case.

Tyne Daly and Michael McGuire play the team of doctors who discover the young man's

"normality," and begin a long process of rehabilitation and re-learning of basic human facilities. Absorbing, poignant, beautifully done.

If you watch nothing else this week, find time to sit down with this moving, absorbing, highly-polished little gem.

Unrated.

DUEL IN THE SUN [1946]  
Saturday, May 17

Controversial back in the post-war years for its daring presentation of adult relationships on the screen, David O. Selznick's Western seems almost quaint by today's standards and more realistic views of life.

Jennifer Jones, Gregory Peck, Joseph Cotton, Lillian Gish, and Lionel Barrymore star in a tense saga of brotherly rivalry in the rough-and-tough Old West.

B, in 1947.

THE GREAT ESCAPE [1963]  
Part I  
Saturday, May 17

This was originally scheduled

for airing on April 26, then rescheduled for May 10 — and re-scheduled for tonight, we hope! Thrilling rendition of a fact-based story about an elaborate escape from P.O.W. camp attempted by Allied prisoners during World War II, the story traces the multiple efforts of the officers and men to work together as allies in a common effort to outfox their German captors — on a grand scale.

The fascination in the film has to do with the careful unfolding of the plan, its evolution and refinement, its scope (250 men plan to take a powder), and the step-by-step details of execution and mishaps along the way.

It all builds to a stunning, sobering climax that will both tug at your heart and keep it racing. Among many outstanding performances are those of Steve McQueen, James Garner, Richard Attenborough, and — yes, Virginia — Charles Bronson, in his solid pre-idol days. Part II will be shown Monday, May 19, maybe!

A-I

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